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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: POL-MIL OUTLOOK FOR 2006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Maryruth Coleman for Reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. In 2006, a new leadership team will consolidate its power within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) will continue the process of transformation to meet NATO's standards and prepare for the challenges of the future. Slovenia's defense and security planners will likely focus on the areas of highest strategic concern to Slovenia: Kosovo and Bosnia. In deploying assets to operations further afield, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the GOS is looking for ways to cement good ties with the U.S. and NATO while trying not to overstretch its resources. In the area of defense reform, Slovenia will gradually restructure its top-heavy military by bringing in new NCOS and officers while easing out those at the middle and top levels; it will focus on building a professional esprit de corps based more on expeditionary capability and less on territorial defense; and it will look to procure assets that help Slovenia integrate more fully into NATO. END SUMMARY.

New MOD Leadership Team: Focus is on Loyalty

¶12. (SBU) The year 2005 saw many changes in the MOD's top leadership. Three of the "big guns" reporting directly to the Minister of Defense and the State Secretary (Deputy Minister equivalent) were replaced in 2005. Thus, Tadej Burgar replaced longtime Embassy contact Uros Krek as Director of Defense Policy; Igor Logar replaced Igor Nered as Director of Defense Affairs; and Damijan Dolinar replaced Jozef Lacko as acting Director for Logistics. Additionally, the Director of the MOD's Intelligence and Security Service (OVS), Zoran Justin, was replaced by Damir Crnec, and the MOD Secretary General, Franc Javornik, was replaced by Albin Cose. In almost all of these cases, the new personnel were promoted from the middle ranks of the existing defense establishment.

¶13. (C) Numerous Embassy contacts have told us that the leadership shuffle is a result of Erjavec's lack of experience with defense policy as well as his own personal insecurity, which has led him to seek out new advisors who will be more loyal to him personally. With the number two position in the MOD held by Franci Znidarsic, a longtime ally and childhood friend of Prime Minister Janez Jansa (see Bio Note in paragraph 22), it is also clear that the personnel changes are at some level politically motivated and reflect both Znidarsic's and Jansa's personal preferences. Outgoing UK Defense Attaché (protect) and some others have speculated that the appointment of weak, second-tier officials to replace the more seasoned professionals dismissed by Erjavec has been used by Jansa and Znidarsic to facilitate their micro-management of the ministry.

Priority Number One: Stability in the Western Balkans

¶14. (SBU) In 2006, Slovenia plans to continue to concentrate its out-of-country deployments in the Western Balkans to promote political stability and secure its own economic and security interests in the region. Slovenia has also announced that the Western Balkans will be one of its chief priorities during its EU presidency in 2008. The reasons for this are clear. With the constant threat of political instability, terrorism, and organized criminal networks operating immediately to its south, Slovenia has a clear national interest in promoting the region's peaceful development and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Slovenia's extensive trade with the countries of the former Yugoslavia and its cultural, economic, and political experience and insight also give it unique leverage in the Western Balkans.

¶15. (C) In 2005, Slovenia almost tripled the number of troops in Kosovo (KFOR) from 32 to 92. In 2006, it plans to continue to increase its participation in KFOR by deploying an additional transport company, bringing the total number of Slovenian personnel to between 300-400. In 2007, the SAF plans to increase its contribution to KFOR still further by deploying a motorized battalion, bringing its end strength in Kosovo to approximately 800 personnel. Speaking to PolMiloff

at a December 12 reception, MOD Director for Defense Policy Tadej Burgar confided that Kosovo provides an excellent testing ground for the SAF's expeditionary capabilities,

noting that Slovenian troops are presently neither adequately trained nor properly equipped for the high intensity operations taking place in "hot spots" like Afghanistan or Iraq.

16. (C) In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the number of Slovenian troops deployed to EU Operation Althea is projected to decrease slightly from the current level of 99 troops to approximately 85 troops by the end of 2006. Despite the gradual decrease in personnel, however, Slovenia continues to see BiH as an important geostrategic area. In 2005, the SAF reconfigured its personnel in BiH by withdrawing a motorized company and replacing it with a company-sized unit of approximately 60 HUMINT operators. Because of its more intimate knowledge of the language, culture, and people, Slovenia sees HUMINT as an area where it can make a significant contribution to regional stability. In the coming years, Slovenia will likely seek to increase its HUMINT operations throughout the Western Balkans.

Supporting operations in Afghanistan and Iraq

17. (C) In Afghanistan, Slovenia is not likely to increase its troop contributions in 2006 beyond current levels, according to MOD Defense Policy Director Tadej Burgar. (NOTE: Slovenia currently has 58 troops deployed to ISAF in Kabul and Herat).

In Iraq, the GOS is currently evaluating how to contribute as many as four demining and/or Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) trainers to the NATO Training Mission (NTM-I). Thus far, the GOS's contributions to Iraq include 5 million Euro worth of light weapons (AK-47s) and ammunition donated to the Iraqi Security Forces, 100,000 Euro donated to the NTM-I Trust Fund, and five trainers deployed to train the Iraqi police at the Jordan International Police Training Center. At present, however, Slovenia does not have any "boots on the ground" in Iraq.

18. (C) The decision whether to send demining/EOD trainers to Iraq will test the GOS's commitment to NATO and the U.S.-led war on terror at a time when the government's public popularity has declined from the historically high levels it achieved following the October 2004 elections (60 percent) to a more normal level (40 percent). Prime Minister Jansa has assured COM he wants to make a deployment to Iraq happen. Echoing this point during a December 22 conversation with PolMiloff, MFA Security Policy Director Stanislav Vidovic claimed the question is not "whether" Slovenia will deploy trainers to NTM-I, but rather "who and how." On January 6, Prime Minister Jansa's Senior Advisor, Aleksander Lavrih, told PolMiloff that a decision would be forthcoming within a week.

19. (C) The decision to send demining/EOD trainers has been mired in technical difficulties with finding billets for these trainers at SHAPE. When the idea of sending demining/EOD trainers from the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) was originally discussed with the GOS in October, the reaction was positive.

The GOS had (and continues to have) a strong preference for deploying ITF civilian trainers for at least three reasons -- first, deploying civilians would be more palatable for domestic public opinion; second, humanitarian demining fits the image that Slovenia wants to sell to its own citizens as well as to the international community; and finally, the ITF is seen as one of Slovenia's "crown jewels" and the utilization of its personnel would demonstrate the organization's ability to go "out of area" at a time when its mission in the Western Balkans is winding down. All of these reasons led the GOS to provisionally endorse the bold new step of deploying personnel to Iraq at a time when many other countries were reducing their commitments.

110. (C) The difficulty in finding billets for civilian demining/EOD trainers has led the GOS to explore the option of sending military trainers. We have been assured that Slovenia is capable of providing military demining/EOD trainers and expect a decision to be announced in January, pending full political support from all four parties in the governing coalition. An op-ed placed by COM in the national print daily "Vecer" on December 14 (on the eve of the Iraqi elections) inaugurated Mission's public diplomacy campaign to develop broader public support for such a deployment. Initial reactions to the idea in the national press have been largely positive.

Counter-Proliferation Activities

¶11. (SBU) In the area of counter-proliferation, Slovenia has come to play a more active role and has endorsed new initiatives that will enhance its ability to deter, detect, interdict and investigate proliferation activities. Post has worked with NP and DTRA to get Slovenia invited to participate as an observer in ARIEX 06, a DOD/ICP-sponsored WMD interdiction exercise in the Adriatic Sea scheduled for March 27-31, 2006. Participants will include Croatia, Albania, Macedonia, Poland, and the U.S., with observers from Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Montenegro. A planning meeting to be held in Split, Croatia between January 25-27, 2006 will give the Slovenes an opportunity to work with regional colleagues and develop valuable contacts in this vital security area.

¶12. (C) After repeated encouragement from Post, Slovenia has informally announced a bold new initiative to host a PSI container security exercise in May 2007 in the Slovenian port of Koper. Current plans are to invite Italy, Croatia, and perhaps several additional countries to participate. MFA Security Policy staffer Bostjan Jerman told PolMiloff that the proposal had been tentatively approved by FoMin Rupel but that government approval will be needed in order to appropriate funds from the 2007 budget. Slovenia is likely to ask for USG support/assistance in hosting this exercise.

¶13. (SBU) Following an April 2005 Agreement between the Slovenian Ministry of Finance (MOF) and the U.S. Department of Energy on implementation of the Second Line of Defense program in Slovenia, construction is scheduled to begin in February 2006 to install radiation detection systems (portals) at the Slovenian port of Koper and the Obrezje border crossing with Croatia. Installation of the portals is currently scheduled to be completed by July 2006. The installation of these portals will mark another important step forward and the fulfillment of a top Mission priority.

¶14. (SBU) In the area of dual-use licensing, where the Ministry of Economy (MOE) takes the lead, less progress has been achieved. The Internal Control Program for dual-use licensing and other bilateral programs for dual-use licensing have continuously run into problems with the MOE. Post will continue to engage the leadership of the MOE to get these programs back on track.

Defense reform

¶15. (C) In the area of defense reform, we can expect the SAF to continue to transform itself from a territorial defense force into a more expeditionary force focused on global threats. The SAF has made a priority of training and equipping its NATO Reaction Force (NRF) assets, including the 18th Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) Battalion and the 10th and 20th Motorized Battalions. However, our assessment is that more will need to be done. Despite the forecasted training and acquisitions, the NBC Battalion will still lack a biological detection and decontamination capability by the time it rotates into the NRF in July 2006 (for NRF rotation 7). Both the 10th and 20th Motorized Battalions currently lack the combined training in high intensity operations that would make them truly mission capable. Absent this training, these units are not fully ready for the broad range of NATO missions that may emerge in the future.

¶16. (C) Slovenia's other areas of focus will include its Special Operations Forces (SOF), which were reorganized in December 2005 as part of the SAF's new Intelligence and Reconnaissance Battalion. In both special operations and HUMINT, the Slovenes will seek additional training and will need to devote significant resources to bring these units up to Alliance standards.

Procurement and facilities

¶17. (C) In the area of procurement, Slovenia's priorities for the new year include several acquisitions in the C4I area (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence), a MILES (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System) combat simulation system, an IHITS software package for battlefield reconstruction and analysis, the FATS (firearms training simulator), TALON radios and IFF systems for Bell helicopters, 8x8 armored vehicles, as well as HMMWV spare parts. Longer term acquisitions for the 2006-2010 period include tactical airlift capability (C-27 or CASA aircraft), TOW missile systems, and SHORAD air defense systems.

¶18. (SBU) In terms of facilities, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defense Investments, Marshall Billingslea, confirmed on November 16 that NATO would make an investment of "several tens of millions of Euro" in the Cerknje airbase

to endow it with strategic lift capability. Cerknje is a key priority for Slovenia since its upgrade would endow the country with a military airbase and thus reduce reliance on the Brnik International Airport as a hub for military operations.

Air policing

¶19. (C) Air policing is also likely to emerge as an issue in ¶2006. Slovenia's Air Chief, Colonel Igor Zalokar complained to DATT and PolMiloff recently that Italy has provided only one air policing mission over Slovenian airspace to date: on March 30, 2004, the day after Slovenia joined NATO. Italy's failure to provide air policing is reportedly due to delays in signing a Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Slovenia, and has caused considerable consternation within the Slovenian General Staff. (COMMENT: DATT has brought the issue to the attention of NATO Air Headquarters in Izmir, Turkey. END COMMENT.)

Comment

¶20. (SBU) Slovenia has pledged to have 6 percent of its forces deployed overseas by the end of 2006 and to spend 2 percent of its GDP on defense by 2008. In current overseas operations and in planned counter-proliferation activities, Slovenia is making a robust contribution and plans to do even more in the future. These are all considerable achievements for a small country of 2 million people that is in the midst of a profound military transformation only 15 years after the establishment of its Armed Forces.

¶21. (C) As a seasoned student of defense and security policy, Prime Minister Jansa has demonstrated that he understands the value of Slovenia's active membership in the NATO Alliance. In light of recent, far-reaching personnel changes within Slovenia's defense establishment, it appears that Jansa and his team are tightening the reigns in order to push their agenda forward. If Jansa can deliver the support of the other parties in his governing coalition, we expect that he will make good on his pledge to contribute to the NATO Training Mission in Iraq. Post will continue to push Slovenia to live up to its NATO commitments and address our common security concerns.

Biographical Note

¶22. (SBU) BIO NOTE: Born in the same year (1958), Jansa and Znidarsic grew up as childhood friends. Both received degrees in defense studies from the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. After Jansa was named Minister of Defense in 1990, he appointed Znidarsic as Director of Civil Defense. After playing leading roles in Slovenia's territorial defense during its ten-day war of independence in 1991, Jansa and Znidarsic set their sights on the transformation of Slovenia's Territorial Defense Force into an independent military. As Jansa's right-hand man, Znidarsic also helped spearhead Slovenia's entry into NATO's Partnership for Peace. In 1993, while still Defense Minister, Jansa appointed Znidarsic as MOD State Secretary.
END BIO NOTE.

COLEMAN

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